

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-11

WASHINGTON STAR
17 FEBRUARY 1980

STAT

Soviet Arms Test Did Not Violate SALT, U.S. Says

By Henry S. Bradsher
Washington Star Staff Writer

Wary of political controversy, the State Department said yesterday that a recent Soviet missile test had not violated terms of the signed but unratified new strategic arms limitation treaty, SALT I.

Several branches of the administration conferred during the morning before a carefully worded series of answers to questions about the test was made available to inquiring reporters. The answers concluded that "we do not believe at this time" that Moscow has broken SALT terms, and the United States would not make that charge.

But the case was similar enough to problems which arose under the 1972 SALT I treaty that it raised the possibility of another controversy over suspicions of Soviet cheating on treaty terms.

U.S. technical intelligence resources, primarily long-distance radar, detected the missile test in late January. Officials here said a new solid fuel missile designed for launching from submarines was fired from a test range in Soviet Central Asia to a point in the northeastern Soviet Union.

The radio signals sent from the missile to give Soviet experts on the ground reports about its performance were coded. Known as "telemetry incryption" in arms control circles, this coding has been the subject of past negotiations.

It interferes with the ability of the United States, which picks up the radio signals from Soviet tests, to make sure that the Kremlin is complying with SALT treaty limits on missile size and number of warheads. Therefore, the United States sought to restrict it in SALT II, which was signed last June.

The State Department said yesterday that the treaty does not keep the Soviets from concealing information by telemetry incryption unless that concealment impedes the U.S. ability to know if the Soviets are observing treaty limitations, like size and warhead numbers.

But U.S. intelligence was able to tell how large the new missile was and how many warheads it carried from other means than reading its radio reports, the department's answers implied without directly saying so. It referred to "observing the pattern of flight test activity."

Despite this official position, the resumption of incryption at a time of deteriorating relations caused by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was expected by many officials to raise new questions about compliance with SALT II. The administration has said it will observe the treaty terms, even though it is not now seeking Senate ratification, and it expects Moscow to observe them also.